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ABSTRACT

The primary function of classroom supervision is to effect changes in teacher behavior that will result in improved instructional skill. Among the problems associated with supervision are lack of time, lack of specific supervisory techniques, and poor interpersonal relations. Some observational techniques available for supervisors to employ are described. The manner in which the collected data should be analyzed and the determination of a conference strategy based on the analysis of the data is also described. (Author/MLF)

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Making Classroom Supervision Helpful.

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In the course of their duties, educational administrators are called upon to visit classrooms. By educational administrators I mean principals, subject masters, infant mistresses, inspectors, senior mistresses and deputy-principals. In the area of pre-service training, student-teachers are supervised by practising teachers and are visited by C.A.E. lecturers. All of these people are engaged in work of classroom supervision in some way.

During one of these classroom "visits", what are the perceptions of the visitor about the purpose of the visit? And what does the teacher or student-teacher understand about the purpose of the visit? What's in it for her? Why is the supervisor coming? What does he think?

Richard Saxe abruptly states there is no supervision of elementary school teaching but the right kind is desperately needed. "Supervision has failed, I think, because it was feared by teachers and misunderstood by supervisors. But Supervision is needed... The way out of the dilemma is to put the focus of the supervision on the learner, not the teacher, and to involve everyone in the business in assessing (supervising) everything we do all the time."[1] Though claiming several benefits from transferring the focus of attention from the teacher to the pupil, Saxe does maintain that much of value can be learned through analysis of teacher behaviour and that some purposes of supervision may require analysis of what teachers do.

Commenting again on the American scene, Harris[2] states that all across the country, there is a growing conviction that supervisors of instruction are essential in leading the nation's schools toward better education. "The long supported notion that teachers make the critical difference in the lives of children and youth in schools remains unshaken by many years of research on teaching and learning. It follows, then, that an essential focus for improving instruction must be on teachers, teaching, and the teaching-learning process."[3]

Other writers, too, continue to emphasize the importance of the work of individual teachers in classrooms. For instance, Thomas writes, "Principals have a difficult job. The demands are varied and many. No other responsibility is more important than visiting with teachers and attempting to improve the services performed. Whatever else you do, it is imperative that you find time to talk with each teacher and plan the work of the school. After all, the success or failure of schools is largely determined by what teachers do in classrooms and not by what you and I do in administrative offices."[4]

Yet another author Salek[5] suggests that for principals to help teachers improve the quality of their instructions, judgemental attitudes must be completely eradicated. In the place of the evaluation, non-directive supervisory conferencing is suggested. Of course, supervisors are often called upon to evaluate and, being human, cannot avoid doing so. However, this paper emphasizes the helping functions and stresses the need for mutual trust in relationships in order to achieve it.

My general purpose now is to mention some contemporary supervisory problems before making some concrete suggestions for supervisory process.

A distinct parallel exists between the function of the supervisor and the function of the teacher. The primary function of the teacher is to effect changes in student behaviours, preferably in predetermined, desired directions. However, sometimes there are unintended student behaviour changes which can be desirable or undesirable. The primary function of the supervisor is to effect changes in teacher behaviours which will result in improved instructional skill. In other words, the primary function of the supervisor is to help the teacher improve her instructional techniques. The onus for any change is on the teacher. But again the supervisor's behaviour may have unintended and unfortunate effects upon teacher attitudes and behaviours.

There are problems associated with supervision. The first is the lack of time to supervise. Administrators often claim that other pressing duties prevent them from visiting teachers and working with them in classrooms. But do their claims conceal a sense of inadequacy in supervisory skill? Administrators have often been appointed on the basis of their proven teaching ability but usually they are not specifically trained to supervise other teachers.

Another problem concerns the lack of specific supervisory techniques. Teachershave every reason to be disenchanted with supervision when they receive no concrete feedback about their teaching or no suggestions for improving their teaching. The use of observational techniques, however, can enhance supervisory skill and can provide teachers with helpful information about the effects of their teaching.

A third set of problems are associated with the area of interpersonal relations. It is important that the purpose of supervision, which is the improvement of instruction, be clear to supervisor and teacher. This involves communicating the purpose to the teacher and reinforcing that purpose through the supervisor's actions. Often, teachers perceive the supervisor as an evaluator rather than a helper. There is probably a threat to personal and professional security.

On the basis of organizational hierachy and authority, some teachers identify a status gap and therefore feel that they must comply with suggested changes. A supervisor-teacher relationship that helps a teacher to internalize new teaching behaviours is to be encouraged. This is possible where mutual trust exists in the relationship. A teacher is likely to respond trustfully to a supervisor's efforts to help if she believes in the good intentions and the competence of the supervisor.

A supervision model was suggested by Krecsy and Brayne[6] after adaption from Goldhammer.[7]

BASIC SUPERVISION MODEL

PLANNING 10 Min.	Sets stage for other steps of the cycle. Supervisor and supervisee begin to establish a trust relationship at this stage. The supervisor familiarizes self with lesson.
OBSERVATION 30 Min.	Supervisee makes a provisional try (a lesson) performance data gathered (e.g. verbatim) data must be accurate.
ANALYSIS	Identify patterns of behaviour in classroom. Examine and describe the patterns. Identify problems.
STRATEGY	Supervisor makes decision about how the conference is to be conducted. Must make latitude in content of conference.....i.e. data to be used .....order the data is used in.....
CONFERENCE	Feedback on the performance. Effects of teacher behaviour patterns upon students.

In the planning session the supervisor has the opportunity of familiarizing himself with the elements of the lesson plan. He listens while the teacher explains objectives, teaching strategies and methods of evaluating these. While he listens he endeavours to understand the lesson plan. His statements and his questions are designed to help him understand, not to judge, during this stage. Here is the opportunity, too, to build a strong relationship which will become stronger over a period of time.

While the lesson is being presented the supervisor could use an observational technique selected from the following methods or an adaptation of one or more of them.

1. Verbatim. The supervisor writes as completely as possible all teacher and student talk.

2. Partial Verbatim. The supervisor records only some kinds of comments during the lesson, e.g. directions given by the teacher.

3. At Task. On a class seating plan, the supervisor assigns different numerals to a few categories decided beforehand, such as "student at task", "student talking to a neighbour", "student distracted", and so on. The supervisor records the time a cycle of observation begins, notes the words being spoken by the teacher at that moment, then begins assigning a numeral, representing one of the categories, to each student in turn. The cycle is repeated every two - three minutes, depending upon the number of pupils.

4. Teacher - pupil Interaction. Data regarding the teacher's verbal interaction with individual pupils is collected. Using symbols, the supervisor represents the kinds of verbal interaction he wishes to record. For example, the supervisor may draw an arrow or a seating plan when the teacher asks a question of a particular student. A response might be recorded by a returning arrow. An arithmetical sign beside it might indicate positive or negative reaction to the student response.

5. Teacher Flow Chart. The physical movement of the teacher is recorded on a seating plan. The supervisor may choose to identify frequency and time taken for visits to individual pupils.

6. Interaction Analysis, according to Flanders, "consists simply of observing, recording, and counting events as they occur. The usefulness of such a simple procedure will depend on congruence between the purpose of observing and the nature of the categories. Thus the proper application of interaction analysis begins by identifying the purposes of observation clearly and then designing a set of categories that fits the purposes. Only rarely will an existing set of categories be appropriate ."[8] This technique is often used to record the talk belonging to a number of categories.

In selecting the observational tool he will use, a supervisor will often be guided by the teacher's concerns expressed during the planning session. As the supervisor gains experience in the use of these techniques, he will be able to choose the technique yielding the kind of data he needs to record.

As the verbatim technique records all teacher and pupil behaviour, it is useful for collecting information on such verbal behaviour as a teacher's questioning, her handling of responses, the effects that certain types of questions have upon pupil behaviour, clarity of directions and lesson structure.

The next step in the supervision model is analysis of the data collected during the lesson. Are there recurring patterns of behaviour? These can be named and listed in order of frequency and/or importance. If the teacher has expressed an area of concern during the planning session, the process of identifying, naming and listing can be facilitated.

For example, the teacher may have expressed concern about her use of audio-visual aids in her teaching. On the basis of the teacher's concern, the supervisor would select the appropriate observational techniques, in this case "partial verbatim" and "at task". During the lesson the supervisor records the verbal behaviour of teacher and pupils while a wall picture is being discussed, and in a small group using a tape recorder and film strip projector, represents certain categories with numerals on a seating plan.

After the data gathering phase the supervisor analyzes the data with the aim of identifying, naming, and listing the recurring behaviour patterns of the teacher. The partial verbatim data in the above example may reveal that the teacher fails to direct pupils' attention to the wall picture before she introduces a discussion about it. In the small group activities pupils are unclear about the purposes because, again, directions were not communicated. "At task" data supports this finding as several instances of "pupil asking for directions to be restated", "pupil asking neighbour", "teacher repeating directions" and "passive pupil" have been recorded.

Because he has recorded student responses to teacher behaviour, the supervisor is able to determine certain patterns in the use of the audio-visual aids. During the conference afterwards, the supervisor might attempt to help the teacher recognize that certain student behaviour is caused by unclear directions.

Briefly, the supervisor should analyze the observation data and determine the focus for the conference. The latter task is simplified if the teacher has expressed a specific concern during the planning session. Often, however, the teacher has not named a specific concern but has simply requested feedback about the lesson generally. Then the supervisor should examine his data for one or two recurring behaviour patterns which appear to have unintentional and undesirable effects on pupils and give these priority in the conference.

The conference is an opportunity for describing, exchanging feelings, interpreting, and providing the feedback that is so critical if modifications or refinements are to result. This exchange, especially as it relates to feelings and the effect of behaviour on one another, is part of feedback. In providing information, Johnson[9] recommends that it be nonthreatening and that feedback be focussed -

1. on behaviour rather than the person.
2. on observation rather than inference.
3. on description rather than on judgement.
4. on descriptions of behaviour in terms of "more or less" rather than "either or."
5. on behaviour related to a specific situation, preferably to the "here and now," rather than on behaviour in the abstract, or "there and then."
6. on the sharing of ideas and information rather than on giving advice.
7. on exploration of alternatives rather than answers or solutions.
8. on the value it may have to the receiver, not on the value of "release" that it provides the person giving it.
9. on the amount of information that the person receiving it can use, rather than on the total amount that you might have available.
10. on time and place so that personal data can be shared at appropriate times.
11. on what is said rather than why it is said.[10]

When the supervisor gives the teacher the opportunity, at the beginning of the conference, to express his feelings about the lesson she taught, this serves to relieve tension. In addition, the teacher might express some opinion regarding her teaching performance or student behaviour which the supervisor can explore and utilize in moving towards the conference focus.

This paper has emphasized the importance of a planning session in establishing a firm interpersonal relationship between supervisor and teacher and in providing information useful for the observation of the lesson. Some observational techniques available for supervisors to employ during teachers' lesson presentation have been described. The manner in which the collected data should be analyzed and the determination of a conference strategy based on the analysis of data has also been described.

1. Richard Saxe (274, Toledo Ohio Field Chapter) is chairman, Department of Administration and Supervision, College of Education, University of Toledo, Toledo, O. "Elementary Supervision Revisited."

2. Harris, B.M. February, 1976: "Supervisor Competence and Strategies for Improving Instruction", Educational Leadership, 332

3. Ibid., 334.

4. Thomas, D., March, 1975: "The Principal and Teacher Evaluation", The Education Digest, 30.

5. Salek, C.J., September, 1975: "Helping Teachers vs. Evaluating Teachers", N.A.S.S.P. Bulletin, 34.

6. Krecsy, J.P. and Brayne, R.C., "What Do I Do: An Approach to Supervision."

7. Goldhammer, R., 1969: Clinical Supervision, Holt Rinehart, Winston, New York.

8. Flanders, N.A., 1964: Interaction Analysis in the Classroom: A Manual for Observers, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, School of Education, 5.

9. Johnson, D.W., 1972: Reaching Out, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, 16-17.

10. quoted in Alfonso, R.J., Firth, G.R. and Neville, R.J., 1975: Instructional Supervision: A Behaviour System, Allyn and Bacon, Boston, 257-258.

Acknowledgements

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Subsequently, several training programs designed to teach supervisory skills to educational administrators have been conducted. In some of these, I have been associated with my colleague, Mr Len Roles, Staff Inspector Department of Education, Rockhampton, Queensland, who is thanked for his help and advice.